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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 001535

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/GAVITO/HARDING

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: WORRIES ABOUT RED LINES ON UNSCR 1559

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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1. (S) Four well-informed Embassy contacts -- Walid Jumblatt, Nassib Lahoud, Boutros Harb, and journalist Sarkis Naom -- all argued in separate meetings with the Ambassador that pro-Syrian forces in Lebanon are using upcoming presidential elections to bury UNSCR 1559. They (and we) see this as a dangerous development. Jumblatt worries that Saad Hariri will too readily concede the resolution in order to ease his way into the premiership; Jumblatt hopes Washington will deliver a firm message to Hariri about the need to preserve the resolution that likely contributed to his father's death. Lahoud sees Saudi duality at play: Saudi Arabia firmly rejects dealing with Syria yet wants at all costs to avoid a conflict in Lebanon. This, in Lahoud's view, leads to pro-Syrians believing they can force a stake through the heart of UNSCR 1559 while also imposing a weak presidential candidate. Naom, claiming to be in touch with both Iranian diplomats and Hizballah officials, sees opposition to UNSCR 1559 as only the tip of the iceberg. For Iran and Hizballah, any discussion of disarmament is a red line, given Iran's need to maintain a retaliatory strike force, in the event of air strikes against Iran. Harb mused that the anti-UNSCR 1559 push by Syria's allies may give March 14 a bargaining chip in bringing in a March 14 president committed to Hizballah disarmament via other methods. End summary.

UNSCR 1559 BACK IN THE HEADLINES  
AS PRO-SYRIANS TRY TO BURY IT  
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2. (C) In recent days, UN Security Council Resolution 1559, adopted on 9/2/04 (the day before the Syrian-orchestrated extension of Emile Lahoud's presidential term), is again making headlines in Lebanon. Hizballah and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri are reprising their usual bad cop/good cop roles: Hizballah officials insist that Lebanon's next president explicitly reject UNSCR 1559, while Berri says that, once presidential elections are complete, then UNSCR 1559 can be declared subsumed into UNSCR 1701, passed in August 2006 to end the Hizballah-Lebanese hostilities. Berri's argument is that two of UNSCR 1559's demands -- the withdrawal of Syrian troops and presidential elections free of foreign interference -- will have been implemented. The "disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias" of OP3, he insists, is superseded by the language in UNSCR 1701, which refers back to UNSCR 1559.

UNSCR 1559 AND UNSCR 1701:  
NO EQUIVALENCY ON DISARMAMENT  
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13. (S) UNSCR 1559 has long been described by pro-Syrians here as an unfriendly resolution imposed on Lebanon, whereas UNSCR 1701, which had Lebanese input and was approved by the entire (then united) Lebanese cabinet, is perceived as a "friendly" resolution. But by being so vocal about the need to set aside UNSCR 1559, pro-Syrian politicians have provoked new suspicions among March 14 contacts. We note that the spirit of UNSCR 1701 is far different than the unambiguous language regarding disarmament in UNSCR 1559. In UNSCR 1701, OP3, by talking about prohibiting weapons "without the consent of the Government of Lebanon," seems to offer an escape clause from UNSCR 1559's disarmament obligations: if a Lebanese cabinet with sufficient Hizballah strength (i.e., control of the "blocking third") gives its consent to Hizballah's weaponry, then those weapons are not in violation of UNSCRs. In OP8 in UNSCR 1701, the language on disarmament is better, but OP8 contains a whole list of "principles and elements" aimed at a "permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution." In other words, by jettisoning UNSCR 1559 and relying only on UNSCR 1701, Hizballah has two tools in its hand: the possibility of GOL "consent" for its arms, and the linkage to all the elements of a broader settlement with Israel.

JUMBLATT HOPES WASHINGTON WILL EMPHASIZE  
TO HARIRI IMPORTANCE OF RESOLUTIONS  
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14. (S) MP Walid Jumblatt told the Ambassador in a 10/2 meeting that the pro-Syrian insistence to drop UNSCR 1559 -- relayed to Hariri by Berri in their recent consultations, and then shared by Hariri to March 14 leaders -- is evidence that it is "worthless" to talk about a "consensus" president. There is no such thing. Jumblatt believes that the pro-Syrians strive to insulate Hizballah from disarmament via three overlapping methods: declaration that UNSCR 1559 is no longer relevant (a condition Hizballah will impose on any presidential candidate and will also insert in the new cabinet program), imposition of a weak president who cannot defy Hizballah or Syria, and insistence on a "blocking third" within the cabinet to be able to threaten cabinet collapse if any progress toward disarmament is attempted.

15. (S) Jumblatt expressed worry that the pro-Syrians just might get all three of those conditions, in part because of Hariri's prime ministerial ambitions. Hariri, Jumblatt believes, wants to start his premiership in a "calm environment," and creating a calm environment means conceding to Hizballah's wishes. It would be an "outrage" for March 14 to "give up" UNSCR 1559, given the number of UNSCR 1559 "martyrs" there are, Jumblatt said. "Rafiq Hariri paid for UNSCR 1559 with this life." Jumblatt expressed the hope that, in Washington, Hariri will be bucked up regarding the "international legitimacy," with UNSCR 1559 being noted as a key part of the international defense of Lebanon's sovereignty and independence.

NASSIB LAHOUD: SAUDI FEARS OF CONFLICT  
MAY LEAD TO ADVICE TO HARIRI TO COMPROMISE  
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16. (S) March 14 presidential hopeful Nassib Lahoud was equally worried as Jumblatt, but he did not see Saad Hariri as an enthusiastic participant in burying UNSCR 1559. Instead, Lahoud mused about Saudi instructions to Hariri. Saying that he has this information "from very good sources close to the King," Lahoud (whose sister-in-law used to be married to King Abdullah) said that Saudi Arabia remains furious at Syria. While this Saudi boycott of Syria is

normally a good thing -- and it permitted Hariri to be unusually vocal in his criticism of Damascus lately -- there is another tendency of Saudi Arabia, Lahoud insists, that is less helpful. Saudi Arabia at all costs wants to avoid conflict. So Saudi Arabia, while snubbing Damascus, might very well be telling Hariri to go along with a deal with Berri, in order to prevent a crisis over the presidency. This Saudi tendency toward caution is probably giving the pro-Syrians the hope that it is now realistic to kill the hated UNSCR 1559. Hariri might not be able to push back, because of Saudi instructions to avoid a conflict.

"BLOCKING THIRD" NOT AS BAD  
A CONCESSION AS PRESIDENT, UNSCR 1559  
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17. (S) Like Jumblatt, Lahoud argued that it would be an enormous mistake for March 14 to concede either on UNSCR 1559 or on the presidency. But, unlike Lahoud, he thought that, if March 14 had to concede something, it should concede the "blocking third" in the cabinet. If the president, PM, parliamentary majority, and most ministers remain on the side of March 14, then March 14 wishes will mostly prevail. If the Hizballah-dominated "blocking third" of the cabinet turns out to be an insurmountable nuisance, then the March 14 PM can resign, re-starting the cabinet formation process. What is frightening about the "blocking third" now, Lahoud emphasized, is the president's ability to sign the cabinet-formation decree, a power that cannot be overcome. But, once Emile Lahoud is out of office and a March 14 president installed, the president's signatory power becomes an asset, not a liability, for March 14. Expressing annoyance that March 14 is pressured to give up its constitutional right to elect a president, Lahoud mused about whether agreeing to concede the "blocking third" in the cabinet would be sufficient to satisfy those European and Arab countries insisting that March 14 be the side to compromise.

ATTEMPTS TO KILL UNSCR 1559 PART  
OF IRANIAN STRATEGY FOR RETALIATORY FORCE  
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18. (S) An-Nahar journalist and political columnist Sarkis  
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Naom was equally alarmed by the attempts to kill UNSCR 1559, but he looked at it in the broader context. Citing insights he claimed to glean from Iranian diplomatic and Hizballah contacts, Naom said that the Iranian-Hizballah positions develop in the context of regional developments. With the possibility of military strikes against Iranian nuclear targets, Iran will not abide any attempt to move toward Hizballah's disarmament now. Hizballah's weapons will be preserved at all costs, in order to be used in retaliation against Israel, in case of an attack on Iran. So the assumptions that Iran, unlike Syria, doesn't care about Lebanon's presidency is false. Iran cares deeply that the president be so weak as to be unable to promote disarmament. Iran will use Hizballah to prevent the emergence of any kind of credible president, Naom said, and will insist on the abandonment of UNSCR 1559. "It is impossible for Iran to compromise when it comes to Hizballah's rockets," Naom concluded.

BOUTROS HARB: MUSING ABOUT "DOING" 1559  
WHILE CONCEDED IT VERBALLY  
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19. (S) Over dinner with the Ambassador on 10/1, March 14's second presidential aspirant, Boutros Harb, shared similar concerns about the attempts by pro-Syrian Lebanese to declare UNSCR 1559 no longer applicable. UNSCR 1559 is a "foundation stone" of Lebanon's freedom, Harb said, using his lawyer's training to analyze differences with UNSCR 1701, with the latter lacking in his view. But, he said, "we're going to

have to give something" to get a March 14 president sufficiently accepted in Lebanon to avoid some kind of crisis. Harb wondered whether March 14 leaders might tell Berri that, if the pro-Syrians accept either Nassib Lahoud or himself being elected, then March 14 will agree that, for Lebanon, UNSCR 1559 is "moved under the 1701 file." Neither Nassib or himself will abandon the drive to bring Hizballah's weapons under the control of the state, so maybe there could be a "semantic" concession to March 8. March 8 could declare victory, in that the March 14 leaders would agree verbally to set UNSCR 1559 aside, but then the March 14 president, PM, and majority would work to see it implemented in fact. The Ambassador reminded Harb that Lebanon does not have the right to set aside UNSCRs or unilaterally declare them implemented. The point, Harb retorted, is to "end the era of militias." So far, "your methods aren't working. Maybe mine will."

COMMENT

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¶10. (S) Like our March 14 contacts, we are alarmed by the new insistence by the pro-Syrians to drop UNSCR 1559 one way or another. We are reassuring our contacts that the USG and other UNSC members are not in the habit of abandoning UNSCRs, so they need not worry that UNSCR 1559 is about to be forgotten history. Yet this new focus by the pro-Syrians on UNSCR 1559 is just a taste of the problems to come. Even if presidential elections pass successfully, this issue will no doubt be one of many areas of conflict that must be worked out for the new cabinet program that, along with the ministerial roster, is submitted the parliament for the cabinet's vote of confidence.

¶11. (S) We agree with Jumblatt that it is a good idea for Washington to remind Hariri of the importance of UNSCR 1559: while we don't believe that Hariri would subscribe to setting aside the resolution that arguably led to his father's death, it will be useful for him to be able to return to Lebanon and tell his contacts of the importance of this issue and that it absolutely cannot be ignored or set aside. After all, if the new president and new cabinet (including the new PM that could be Saad himself) do not commit themselves to UNSCR 1559 (even if full implementation takes time), it will be very hard for us to continue to offer extensive economic, social, and military assistance that Lebanon needs. A new president and new PM and new cabinet will surely want this assistance to continue, and Hariri, we hope, will grasp the linkage of our help with UNSCR 1559.

FELTMAN